

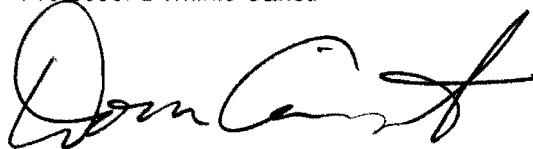
Creating NovelTV: The Integration of Books and Media in Digital America

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Lydia Storie

Professor Dominic Caristi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dom Caristi', with a large circular flourish at the beginning and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract and Creative Statement of Purpose

There are literally hundreds of specialized television channels in existence, but not one channel in America is devoted solely to the topic of books. As an avid reader and regular television viewer, I used this project as the opportunity to develop a concept that would combine the two forms of media in an attractive program format. Included here are the two textual components that I developed to express my vision and its viability: a sales pitch outlining the components of the proposed program and an extensive examination of contemporary trends regarding digital media and books in an essay form that reinforces the material presented in the pitch packet. In particular, this essay looks at recent developments in television technology and viewing habits, the rise of user interactivity due to the influences of digital technology, the integration of books with such technology, the influence of the media on reading activity and book sales, and the potential for an interactive television program about books to succeed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Dominic Caristi for advising me on this project, particularly for his guidance in how to develop a pitch for a television show/channel. Professor Caristi also provided me with resources to aid in the process of creating a pitch as well as guidance in finding important media-related information.

I would also like to thank my friend Elizabeth Stebbins for pointing me in the direction of much valuable research and for her knowledgeable and helpful advice regarding my sales pitch.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. James Ruebel for sitting in on my pitch presentation and for the feedback he provided about my delivery as well as my proposed idea.



NovelTV

An Interactive Television Channel About Books

NovelTV:

A Media “Hub” for Book Lovers

NovelTV combines television programming with Internet capabilities to create a new kind of interactive media experience for readers who like to watch TV.

Television Content

- hosted talk show segment that features new books
- interviews with authors
- video reviews
- documentary programming related to book content
- movies

Internet Offerings

- instant and voice messaging between viewers
- book-related trivia quizzes
- links to:
 - e-books
 - audio-books
 - book blogs
 - print reviews
 - and other relevant material

Need for New Content?

- 9 in 10 U.S. households subscribe to either cable or satellite TV service
- Hundreds of specialized channels available
- No channel exists solely for content about books!

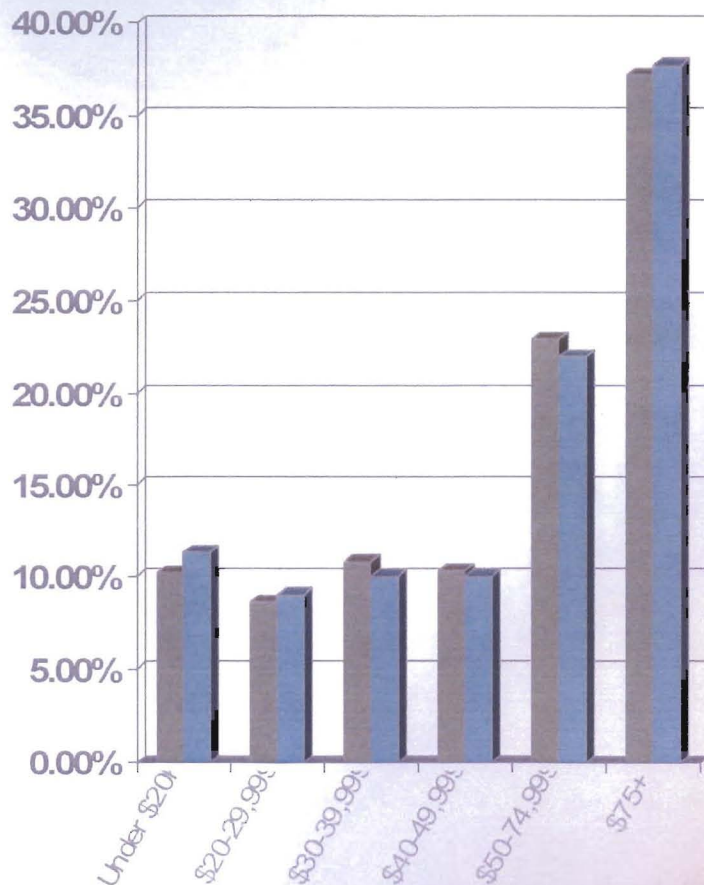


This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box.

--Edward R. Murrow

Viewers and Readers

■ DBS Subscribers ■ Book Buyers



Level of Income

- Those consumers most likely to subscribe to extended television service are those who are also the most likely to purchase books
- Most viewers want more non-fictional programming
 - 81% of DBS viewers say that educational programming is their favorite genre, and 49% would like to see more added to their subscription packages
 - 84% say that the documentary genre is their favorite, and 41% would like more of this added to their subscriptions

Satellite Broadcasting Association, 2003

*Graph data from Mediamark Research, Inc. 2005

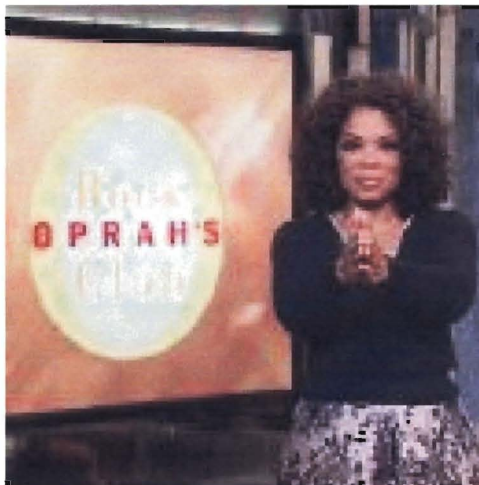
Books and the Media

- “Readers are increasingly taking their clues (on what to buy) from the people they watch and listen to.” –Anne Kubek, *Borders*
- “Nothing sells books more than a movie. . . . The most successful books enjoy four incarnations: hardcover, paperback, movie, and video/DVD.”
– Bob Minzesheimer, *USA Today*
- Media-based book clubs have successfully elevated book sales.

The Oprah Effect

- Oprah's Book Club has been extremely successful:

- inspired 46 best sellers between 1996 and 2002



- Major Media Spin Offs:

- The Today Show:

- Today's Books

- Good Morning America:

- Read This!

- The New York Times*:

- The Times Reading Group

- “You have four national media brands telling their audiences that this is worth their time. You can't put a price tag on that.”

- Stuart Applebaum, Random House

The Internet and TV

- U.S. viewers watch television more than 4 hours a day
- 66.2% of Americans go online while watching TV

Research Alert Yearbook, 2005



- A recent Points North Group Survey found that of 1,098 internet users, 28% wanted to watch regular television shows on their PCs or laptops
- There are a growing number of TV shows available for Internet download

Interactive Model: In2TV

- AOL and Warner Bros.' online television service that airs episodes of cancelled television shows
- Along with the programs, In2TV offers interactive content: trivia quizzes, video games, search functions, email and instant messaging capabilities, and mobile phone downloads
- Received over 1 million hits in first four months



Producing NovelTV

Financial Overview

- Relatively low-cost production
- Potential source of video-on-demand revenue
- Vertical integration and book promotion:
 - The five biggest publishers are now all part of media entertainment conglomerates
 - Random House, Penguin, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins, Time Warner
 - Accounted for 67% of book sales in 2004

USA Today, 2005

Potential Partners

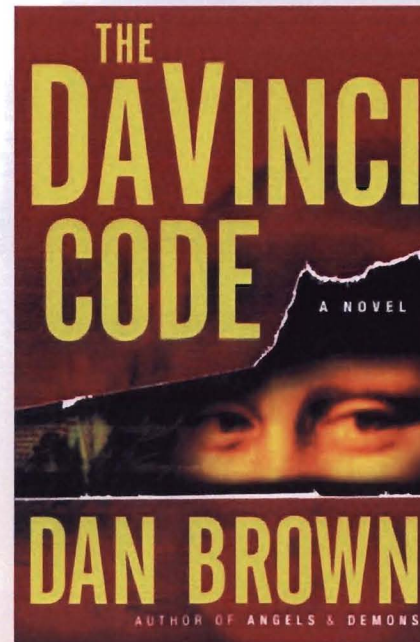
- Random House
- HarperCollins
- Bookreporter.com
- Audiobookcafe.com
- Amazon.com
- Barnes & Noble
- Sony
- In2TV
- Simon Spotlight Entertainment

Next on NovelTV . . .

Bestselling books will draw the biggest audience.

Potential Featured Titles:

- *The Da Vinci Code*
- *The Lord of the Rings*
- *Brokeback Mountain*
- *Memoirs of a Geisha*
- *He's Just Not That Into You*
- *Harry Potter*
- *Because of Winn Dixie*
- *The Princess Diaries*
- *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*



In the introduction to *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, editors Jan Olsson and Lynn Spigel claim that "Television—once the most familiar of everyday objects—is now transforming at such rapid speeds that we no longer really know what 'TV' is at all" (6). In an age of innovative digital media technology, the radical evolution of television parallels even greater changes across our heavily mediated society. New consumer attitudes have emerged as a result of digital media which allow for almost instantaneous access to a plethora of user-selected information and entertainment, nurturing a demanding mindset that media analyst and consultant Brian Seth Hurst describes as "I want what I want where and when I want it." With new media forms materializing on a regular basis that cater to this demand, producers of television and other older forms of media have had to negotiate ways to keep up with social and consumers trends.

Most recently, in response to a declining consumer interest in books, publishers have started to seek out ways of aligning their product with contemporary consumer desires. The cultural stability of books, one of the most traditional forms of printed media, has been thoroughly challenged by the rise in electronic digital media. Electronic information delivery has altered reading habits as well as attention spans, and the growing number of digital entertainment devices continuously diverts attention away from the act of reading. By the end of the 20th century, few Americans expressed interest in reading—unless they were reading something that had a connection to the electronic media. Recognizing the influence television and film have had on reading habits, some publishers are beginning to integrate their books with the use of newer digital media devices in the hope that this will have an encouraging effect similar to that of the mass media in the promotion of certain titles.

When looking at such trends in digital media consumption, television production, and book publication, I realized that the synthesis between new and traditional forms of media is both necessary and natural in the development of American "mediated" culture. The deliberate fusion of technology and content has the potential to preserve important elements of culture while also advancing new ideas, with

the result of enhancing both the old and the new. With this in mind, I propose that a book-related television channel built on interactive technology could serve to maintain books as an integral part of our culture while also fulfilling the demands of contemporary consumers of digital media. While I do not expect this kind of format to appeal to all media consumers, the research presented here will demonstrate a substantial promise for the success of such a television channel.

Transformations in Television

Since the 1950s, television has been a commonplace feature in most American homes. Now, half a century since the medium's popular debut, most people in the United States not only own a television set but also subscribe to some kind of multi-channel service that offers an ever-increasing range of program choices. EPM Communication's *Research Alert Yearbook* for the year of 2005 points out that nine in ten U.S. households subscribe to either cable or satellite TV services, in which even the most basic service packages typically include 10 to 20 times more channels than broadcast service alone. "Premium" service packages can offer literally hundreds of channels, depending on the service provider and kind of service received—digital cable or satellite service are capable of delivering even more content than traditional cable. With most Americans already receiving somewhere between 50 and a few hundred channels, the demand for new content to fill the airwaves is greater than ever.

The number of viewers who subscribe to the more extensive digital television services has steadily increased over the past few years, indicating that the growing need for content is not likely to diminish anytime soon. Together, the two major direct broadcast satellite (DBS) service providers, DirecTV and Dish Network, served 23.1 million television viewers in 2004 (RAB "Satellite"). While this number may pale somewhat in comparison the 75 million homes reached by cable service in the United States, DBS has acquired practically one-fourth of the American television viewing population in little more than a decade. Growing at the rate of approximately 2.5 million subscriptions each year, the new DBS service has

increased almost twice as fast as cable service, which took over 50 years to build up to its current number of subscriptions at a rate of about 1.5 million new subscriptions per year. While greater accessibility due to advances in media technology surely accounts for some part of DBS's rapid growth over the past decade, the wide variety of programming offered by digital broadcasting arguably provides for more popular appeal among viewers who are increasingly able to watch exactly *what* they want.

Niche programming caters to this craving for individualized media entertainment. As cable networks expanded throughout the 1990s, providers were able to offer more specialized content through a broader range of channels. The newer technology used by direct broadcast satellite allows the DBS service providers to transmit even more program content through compressed digital signals, giving them a competitive edge in the viewer market that places a high value on variety of choice. A corresponding rise over the past few years in digital cable service attests to this viewer desire for more obtainable programming. According to the *Research Alert Yearbook*, 41% of homes in the United States had digital television service, either DBS or digital cable, by the end of 2005, suggesting that more and more viewers are finding enjoyment in television programming tailored to their individual interests.

The niche programming phenomenon indicates that advances in digital technology have not only altered the way in which television content is delivered, but also the way programming is received. Along with the rise in subscriptions to digital television services, the television culture has begun to undergo a fundamental shift due to increased viewer use of digital video recorders (DVRs). DVR devices, like the popular TiVo, allow viewers to record, pause, or rewind live television programs, as well as to save high quality content onto a hard drive for future use. First introduced into the consumer market in 1999, DVRs have penetrated the general population of television viewers at a steadily increasing rate, encouraging more and more viewers to essentially become their own television programmers. Viewers who take advantage of this technology are no longer subject to the program schedules set by broadcasters and cable/satellite service providers, nor do they have to sit through unwanted commercial advertisements. By

enabling viewers to take control of their own television agendas, DVR technology gives them a significant amount of freedom to cultivate their individual experiences with this medium.

This kind of liberty clearly appeals to many viewers in the United States. Although DVRs were somewhat slow to catch on during their first few years, a survey for the 2005 *Research Alert Yearbook* reported that DVR use practically doubled between 2001 and 2003 within the 18-39-year-old age bracket, a rise which indicates a popular enthusiasm for the capabilities of this new, liberating technology. This study also revealed that DVRs led to an increase in both viewing time and viewer satisfaction: over the same two-year span, DVRs users watched 24% more television than did non-users and were 37% more likely to be satisfied with their experience, particularly because the device allowed for the accommodation of busy schedules. This desire among viewers to watch what they want to watch *when* they want to watch it seems to be catching on even among those viewers who do not yet own a DVR: although only 12% of cable/satellite customers owned a DVR system in 2004, 41% of these consumers indicated that they would be likely to use one in the future. Based on the trend evident in the 2001-2003 report, many of these 2004 respondents have probably already purchased the device about which they speculated over a year ago. Technological resources like the DVR seem to feed into a growing inclination among the United States population to acquire and maintain individual control of mediated information and content.

Without a doubt, the way in which technologically-savvy, media-saturated viewers of the early 21st century experience television clearly differs from the earlier passive viewing of content aired by the one of the reigning broadcast networks of the "Big 3." Many of today's viewers take an active role in their consumption of television programming, choosing what they want to see from an ever-expanding range of options and/or using a DVR to decide when they want to watch their preferred programs. Much of this cultural shift, however, has occurred quite recently and is by no means universal among the entire viewing population. Because of the rapid pace of change, though, many media specialists and business professionals expect the trend of active television viewing to continue. Financial services firm Morgan

Stanley projects that by 2010, "viewers in 76.4 million homes will be able to watch shows when they want and zip through ads . . . due to aggressive promotion by cable, satellite and electronics companies of digital video recorders (DVRs) and other devices" (Lieberman). Implicit in this projection is the assumption that cable and satellite television providers will begin to use DVR technology as a way to market their services, a scheme that itself would further encourage the shift that is already occurring among many American viewers.

While digital broadcasting and video recording directly affect the transmission and reception of television programming, other forms of digital technology contribute more indirectly to certain changes in television viewing habits. Probably the most influential of all digital technologies in recent years has been the Internet, which has undeniably altered habits of media consumption in general. In some cases, however, the Internet has directly contributed to changes in the way viewers can receive television programming. On a broad cultural level, the Internet has become a fixture in the lives of most media consumers as a source of information and entertainment, competing somewhat with television for audience attention. However, the Internet seems to foster the practice of multitasking among Americans, functioning as one medium that allows viewers to "consume multiple media simultaneously" (*Research Alert*). While a 2005 study by the Radio Advertising Bureau found that average viewer in the United States watches television for about 4 hours a day, the *Research Alert Yearbook* declares that 66.2% of viewers like to go online *while* watching. Although this report does not say whether these online viewers utilize the Internet to enhance their experience of television programming, there certainly exists a possibility. Some programs, including ABC's *Lost*, NBC's *Scrubs*, and several network newscasts, have begun to recognize this new habit of simultaneous multiple-media consumption and encourage their viewers to log onto their respective websites before, during, and after the program.

While many viewers continue to use the Internet separately from their television sets, some people are actually turning their computers *into* television sets. In the article "Internet Service to Put Classic TV on

Home Computer," *New York Times* reporter Saul Hansell describes the growing number of individuals who are hooking up their TVs to their computers as a major reason why AOL and Warner Bros. decided to develop In2TV, an online television service that provides episodes of cancelled television shows over the web. Hansell cites a Points North Group survey which found that 28% of 1,098 surveyed Internet users "said they wanted to watch regular television shows on their PCs or laptops" (C4). The one million hits received by In2TV in the four months after its debut in November 2005 certainly seems to confirm these statistics, as does the popular success of MTV Overdrive, a website through which MTV viewers can view programming that corresponds to hit shows but does not air on the television channel ("Out of the Box"). While the ability to watch streaming video requires a relatively powerful computer and high-speed access, those viewers who possess the means to take advantage of these free outlets for online programming seem eager to do so.

Furthermore, some viewers are even willing to purchase episodes of current television programs online in order to view these shows at their convenience, leading several television networks to make their most popular shows available for purchasable downloads. One of the most successful instances of this new practice occurred when ABC released episodes of *Desperate Housewives* and *Lost* through iTunes as downloadable files which viewers could purchase for \$1.99 (Lieberman). Similarly, viewers can purchase episodes of *Survivor* on CBS.com ("Out of the Box"). The success of these endeavors arguably stems from the networks' wise decision to indulge the contemporary consumer attitude, providing viewers with a way to watch what they want when and *how* they want. Paired with the trend of connecting or replacing television sets with computers, the convenience offered by these downloadable programs may eventually make Internet television service a viable alternative to either cable or satellite television service. Brian Seth Hurst, CEO of the Opportunity Management Company, a strategic consultancy, says that "IPTV [Internet Protocol Television] could be the single biggest disrupter of content distribution . . . ever" ("Out of the Box").

The potential for such a great disruption of traditional television service may become even greater if AOL succeeds in securing a potential arrangement that would link Internet programming to TiVO recorders.

At the present time, however, the more traditional television service providers are combating the purchasing of online episodes by mimicking the practice through video on demand (VOD) capabilities. In this case, television viewers with digital service can order single episodes of certain shows directly through an Internet connection onto their television set. While ABC offers its programming only through iTunes, CBS and NBC have established deals with cable and satellite providers that allow viewers to purchase episodes of their most popular shows for \$.99 over VOD service. CBS offers episodes of *CSI*, *Survivor*, and *The Amazing Race* through Comcast digital cable; likewise, NBC recently paired with DirecTV satellite service to sell episodes of *Law & Order: SVU* and *Law & Order: CI* (Lieberman). For those viewers who do not own a TiVO or other DVR device, video on demand provides another means for them to control both what they watch and when they watch it.

Video on demand can function in another important way by offering content to viewers that they are unable to receive elsewhere. In the attempt to retain the number of cable subscribers in the perpetual competition with DBS services, cable service providers have started to incorporate local programming through VOD capabilities. While DBS providers typically do not offer any kind of local content, much of the content available through cable VOD service centers on local events: sports and other competitions (such as Christmas light displays or American Idol-like contests), city/town meetings, or church and other religious services (Grant). Christopher Lawton's article "Made-by-Viewers TV," published in *The Wall Street Journal*, discusses the forthcoming practice of offering user-produced content through VOD, a practice that allows media consumers to take decidedly active role in their experience of media by allowing them to participate in the creation of broadcast programming.

Other program formats emerging through video on demand services encourage viewers to become actively involved with television by allowing them to use the medium itself as a way to interact with other

viewers. Peter Grant explores one example of such interactive programming in his article “Looking for Love (or a Date) on Cable TV.” According to Grant, Comcast has launched the interactive program *Dating on Demand* through VOD across local networks. With this service, single individuals in a community can use their cable remote controls to review profiles of other available individuals on the television set and then make contact with prospective dates through associated online dating sites. Soon, Comcast also plans to enable these participants to create video content that can be uploaded to the cable operators through the Internet (Grant). Significant in this case is the synthesis between digital cable television service, interactive programming, and the Internet. The success of the VOD dating program likely depends on this productive merging of media, a specific kind of fusion which caters to the more general trends of active television viewing and multiple media consumption.

The Recent Rise of Interactivity

Many of the transformations in media consumption habits, particularly the shift from the passive reception of entertainment content to the active manipulation and individualization of media, can arguably be attributed to the continual development of technologies that encourage consumers to interact with a variety of media devices. While digital video recorders and video on demand services certainly fall into this category, other recent technologies—including but not limited to cell phones, iPods, and handheld video gaming systems—have been even more effective in fostering a more interactive media environment. Undeniably, the Internet has undeniably been one of the most influential developments in new electronic media, making an impact on not only the television industry but also most other forms of media, shaping the way consumers want their informational and entertainment content to be delivered. In his article “Made-by-Viewers TV,” Christopher Lawton argues that “a generation of young people raised on the Internet” is not made up of “passive consumers,” a notion that seems to be largely agreed upon by many contemporary media analysts as well as media producers.

The more technology allows users to take control of their media consumption, the more these consumers seem to embrace the growing culture of interactivity, which allows them to indulge their own media demands. In the recent web-conference "Out of the Box: The Changing Media Landscape," sponsored by the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE), strategy consultant Brian Seth Hurst made the point that media consumers in the 18-34-year-old demographic behave quite differently with media content and devices than do members of older demographics. Unquestionably, members of the young adult demographic are more likely to make use of new media technology, a trend that is evident in the earlier discussion of DVR use. The *Research Alert Yearbook* confirms this assertion with the validated statement that "18-34-year-olds consistently report spending an increasing amount of time on the Web, and are also heavy users of cell phones, MP3 players and other digital devices." Hurst, among others, sees the proliferation of media devices and abundance of content as contributing to a noticeable difference in the attention spans of younger generations, a characteristic that may indeed result from changes in media technology but which also makes these consumers receptive to and even excited by increased media interactivity.

To some extent, the concept of interactivity in the media remains undefined, but a general understanding of the idea centers on the kind active involvement in the cultivation of media experience through interaction with media technology that has been integral to this discussion so far. The level of interactivity afforded by particular technologies can differ, but the most recent developments in both distribution methods and media content reflect and reinforce the ever-increasing level of interaction between the user, the technology, and the content. Cell phones, for example, facilitate communication through both voice and text capabilities, but they can also be used to search and download content from the web, to play music, to take and display digital photographs, and to record and play video, among other functions. Users consistently interact with these devices, though the degree of interactivity can be said to vary with each form of use: text messaging is generally considered to be more a more active type of use

than voice conversation, while searching for and downloading video from the Internet may be thought of as even more active than text messaging. Ultimately, the extent to which media consumers utilize devices like cell phones to shape their media experience is more important than the particulars of interactivity. The increased and deliberate use of technology to craft and/or enhance the consumption of media attests to a greater level of user connectedness and engagement with media communication.

This phenomenon has inspired quite a few media producers to create new kinds of media content specifically intended to heighten the amount of potential interactivity and to keep consumers engaged. The concept for the AOL/Warner Bros. internet television delivery system In2TV intentionally included content designed to foster viewer interaction with the programs, such as trivia quizzes, video games, search functions, email and instant messaging capabilities, and mobile phone downloads (Hansell C4). According to Kevin Conroy, Executive Vice President for AOL Media Networks, interactivity figured prominently into the company's goal for the new website: "With In2TV, we are enabling Web users to experience and interact with television programming in an entirely new way" ("AOL"). In light of the current media consumer environment, it seems likely that the interactive features of In2TV have contributed to the site's early success. Although earlier attempts to instill interactive programming into traditional television formats have had little success in the United States, the interactive model that has now been established by In2TV could quite contribute to the major "disruption" that Brian Seth Hurst expects Internet television to initiate within that industry.

Book Consumption in Digital America

As with all technological development, the new digital media revolution has emerged at the expense of older forms of media and technology. Inundated by mediated information and faced with an ever-expanding number of entertainment choices, American consumers are turning away from older leisure pursuits in favor of the activity and instant-gratification offered by new kinds of digital diversion. Books,

once a principal form of popular entertainment, are now struggling to stay afloat in a cultural environment increasingly dominated by electronic media and interactive entertainment. As discussed, contemporary “mediated” Americans possess a different kind of attention span and hold different expectations for past-time activities than did their less wired counterparts on the other side of the century. Despite new challenges to reading activity, though, books remain a separate cultural force. The question, then, is whether books can successfully merge with new technology in such a way that encourages the continued growth of both the written word and digital media culture.

The emergence of television in the 1950s generated some concern about the future of books even then. Of course, such anxiety was not completely unfounded, considering the early popular appeal of electronic media entertainment. While books managed to stay alive thus far, the transformations in American consumer culture that have resulted from the development of new media technologies certainly revitalize ambiguity about the future of books. Indeed, reading activity has been on the decline over the past couple of decades, particularly in regard to literature. In the decade between 1992 and 2002, the number of Americans who had read any book over the course of one year had dropped from 60.9% to 56.6%; literary reading decreased even more sharply, declining by 14% over the same time period. Some cultural analysts interpret these trends as a general indication that the process of extinction for books has begun. *Wall Street Journal* reporter Terry Teachout, for example, believes that, at the very least, the end of printed books is near: “The printed book is a beautiful object, ‘elegant’ in both the aesthetic and mathematical senses of the word, and its invention was a pivotal movement in the history of Western culture. But it is also a technology—a means, not an end. Like all technologies, it has a finite life span, and its time is almost up.” Teachout suggests that printed texts will be replaced by digital electronic formats which will at best preserve the traditional content of books but eliminate the conventional form.

Whether Teachout’s prediction will prove true remains to be seen, but evidence exists which points toward a decline in use of printed material as well as books in general. A survey of online Americans

between the ages of 18 and 54 revealed that, together, the Internet and television are currently the top choices of media for 80% of people who have Internet access in their homes. The Internet, perhaps unsurprisingly, proved to be the most popular form of media, accounting for the top media choice among almost half of the individuals surveyed: when given their choice of media delivery system, 45.6% of these individuals said they would pick the Internet, while 34.6% would choose television. Of the remaining 20% of online individuals who did not choose either the Internet or television as their favorite media, 7.5% of people said that books would be their first choice and 11% would choose books after some other form of media (*Research Alert*). Taking into account both the broad age range of the study and the fact that only individuals with Internet access were surveyed, this study may not be the most accurate representation of contemporary habits of book consumption in America, but the information here clearly reaffirms the notion that books are no longer a highly popular form of mass entertainment.

On the other hand, while books may not account for the favorite choice of media for the majority of “wired” Americans, further evidence suggests that American society is not yet ready to relinquish books from the culture. First, although the majority of people who participated in the above survey chose either the Internet or television as their favorite media, books seem to be the third most popular choice of media, accounting for more of the remaining votes than any other form of media. And, of course, simply because people prefer to use the Internet or watch television does not necessarily mean they will never pick up a book. With the mounting number of books being published each year, anyone interesting in reading should be able to find some kind of book on a topic that interests them. In the 2004 *USA Today* article “10 years of best sellers: How the landscape has changed,” Bob Minzesheimer highlights the fact that almost three times as many books were being published in 2003 than in 1993. According to Minzesheimer, too, over 1,000 new book titles come out every week, creating a plethora of printed entertainment and informational options that parallels the ever-growing abundance of niche choices offered by the digital media.

Even with the increase in the number of available books, however, consumer trends indicate that Americans are still investing their time and money elsewhere. According to the *Research Alert Yearbook*, the average American consumer spends more money on videos and DVDs than on books; for 2005, DVD and video sales amounted to about \$166 per person, while book sales only totaled about \$90 per person (254). Paired with the overall decline in reading activity during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, this trend seems to be an ominous sign for the future of books. However, in contrast to these discouraging statistics, the Association of American Publishers reported an increase in the number of book purchases made by adults between 2003 and 2005 as well as a rise in overall sales. According to their report, the net sales for publishing companies totaled \$23.715 billion in 2004, increasing by approximately 1.3% from the 2003 total of \$23.421 billion (RAB "Book Stores"). Such an increase in new book sales, however slight it may seem, is promising, especially in light of an even greater increase in the sale of used books online.

Online Distribution

The online book industry, fueled primarily by Amazon.com, has expanded rapidly over the past few years, illustrating one important way in which new digital technology has contributed to reading culture rather than detracted from it. Books, both used and new, are currently one of the biggest-selling items in all of online shopping. Reporting on internet sales for the year of 2003, Shop.org declares that book sales accounted for \$761 million in online spending in the month of November alone, increasing by 61% overall from the previous year. The same article predicts that online sales of books will reach somewhere around \$4 billion by the end of 2006 ("Statistics"). By 2004, the sale of *used* books online jumped by 33%, reaching a total of \$609 million and accounting for about 25% of all internet book sales, which amounted to about \$2.2 billion that year (Lowry). Clearly, while fewer Americans overall may be less interested in books, those who are still reading are very interested in purchasing their books online.

Together with the distribution and sale of book over the Internet, some publishers hope that the practice of making texts available online may actually lead to a revived interest in reading. Richard Sarnoff,

president of Random House's corporate development unit, affirms that his publishing company recognizes the impact of the new digital media culture on the consumption habits and expectations of younger, technologically-savvy Americans: "We acknowledge that a generation is growing up that may not have the same visceral connection with the book format. They have read as much on screens as they have on paper. We need vehicles to translate our books in different ways" (Lowry). New forms of digital book distribution have emerged as means of compensation for these cultural shifts by taking advantage of the "connected consumer" phenomenon. For example, some publishing companies, including Random House and HarperCollins, have initiated the practice of allowing consumers to purchase rights to view (rather than order) books online. With this system, customers can pay to view pages of books as PDF files for a few cents a page. The publishing companies began making this effort when the online search engine Google started to scan books in order to make the content searchable for Internet users; the companies successfully sued Google for copyright infringement, stating that the responsibility for making books available online belonged to them (Graham). Presumably, the practice has met with some success, since Google is still scanning books, only now at the request of publishers who will be compensated.

Yahoo, the other major Internet search engine, has started to make out-of-print books available online, a digital archiving effort that demonstrates another ability of the Internet to preserve book culture. The archive founder Brewster Khale explains that "the idea is to create a permanent library that's available to everybody. You can take a classic work of American literature, download it, print it and even bind it if you want to" (Graham). Because these texts are no longer in print, they are available for free to consumers. Combined with the lack of cost, easy access to these works could potentially encourage more people to read texts they may not read otherwise. Depending on the long-term success of Yahoo's literature archive, the database may facilitate a reversal in the declining trend of literary reading among Americans. In any case, for all of these distributors, the practice of online book distribution works on the

assumption that those people who “have read as much on the screen as on paper” will take advantage of the opportunity to access and read texts through their “favorite” form of media—the Internet.

Digital book distribution has also led to a basic transformation in the way books are published. In the article “A Hundred Books in Your Pocket,” Terry Teachout calls attention to a growing phenomenon of independent publishing that threatens to challenge the publishing industry altogether. Citing the rise in electronic book distribution, Teachout claims that “Best-selling novelists . . . will soon be in a position to ‘publish’ their own books, pocketing all the profits—but so will niche-market authors whose books don’t sell in large enough quantities to interest major publishers.” Indeed, popular writers like Stephen King and Tom Wolfe have successfully distributed some of the own work online, and younger, less-established writers are using the Internet to distribute their writing, often for free, in order to build up their reputation. In March of 2000, Stephen King sold 500,000 copies of his e-book *Riding the Bullet* in 48 hours, proving the viability of independent publishing (Rose). A few years later, contemporary science-fiction writer Cory Doctorow became the first writer to release a novel (*Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*) under a Creative Commons license, which allowed for the free circulation of the electronic versions of his book. Like King, Doctorow also publishes bound hardback and paperback books, but Doctorow attributes his commercial success directly to the exposure his books get in electronic form under the Creative Commons licenses (“Cory Doctorow”). This philosophy suggests that the Internet does indeed have the power to revive the book industry, as long as those who distribute texts go about doing so in ways that make reading accessible to contemporary wired consumers. In this light, Terry Teachout’s assumption that the Internet will soon lead to fundamental changes in the way books are published and distributed is probably correct.

E-books Return to the Scene

The success that even such dissimilar writers like King and Doctorow have had recently with electronic distribution suggests that electronic books (e-books) are finally becoming a more established part of the book industry. Although e-books were introduced early in the 1990s, they failed to attract much

attention until King's online novel created a stir among his popular audience. Although King collected the profits from his independently-published e-novel, the *Research Alert Yearbook* reveals that e-books are actually becoming a substantial source of revenue for publishing companies as well as independent writers. According to the cited report, "sales of more than a million units netted publishers more than \$7.3 million in 2003," a statement which also illustrates that a significant number of consumers have begun to purchase e-books in the early 21st century (252). The number of e-book purchases increased between 2003 and 2006, accounting for about \$10 million of the \$24 billion earned by the publishing industry in that year (Snider). Although this amount is only a fragment of the total publishers' sales, the increase in the amount of sales shows that the popularity of e-books may be growing. Services like Gutenberg.com, which offer free versions of certain e-books, are encouraging for those readers who may want to try out free e-books before purchasing others. Approximately 17,000 titles are currently available through Gutenberg.com, including Cory Doctorow's work and a number of classic literary texts (Teachout). Together, the efforts of Gutenberg.com, the Yahoo Internet Archive, and the major book publishers to make books available online demonstrate an attempt to keep books alive in the changing cultural environment by making the content of books themselves a part of the new digital culture.

As previously mentioned, the new culture has most recently been characterized by the widespread use of digital handheld devices as much as the prevalence of the Internet. Taking this trend into account, Sony has developed a new device and distribution method for e-books based on the Apple's incredibly successfully iPod and iTunes package as a means to push them even further into the digital consumer culture. Early e-books failed to catch on in the past at least partially as a result of the eye-strain caused by reading on a PC or PDA. The Sony Reader, however, directly confronts this dilemma with its most significant feature—a new kind of LCD screen technology called "electronic paper" (Snider). The "e-ink" used for the text simulates reading on a page, and the screen itself is much easier on the eyes than a typical computer screen, allowing for longer reading time (Teachout, Snider). The Reader is a convenient,

handheld device that is about the size of a typical paperback book, retaining some of that “visceral connection” with the traditional book format for those readers who are loath to give up that part of the reading experience. Moreover, the portability of device, which can hold hundreds of books in its memory, will likely appeal to consumers already caught up in a phenomenon of digital handheld devices. Terry Teachout compares the potential of the Reader with the actual success of Apple's iPod, stating in “A Hundred Books in Your Pocket” that “The phenomenal success of the iPod strongly suggests that many, perhaps most, consumers are ready to start buying books on the web and storing and reading them electronically.” Indeed, Sony has almost ingeniously combined the trend of handheld digital media consumption with the emerging market for electronic books.

Teachout's statement also alludes to the fact agreed upon by most consumer analysts and media observers that Apple's iPod has been one of the most pervasive of all handheld technologies, catching on among consumers with almost unexpected success. Many attribute the iPod's success to the marketing and distribution package that the music player with access to an online music store, iTunes, from which users purchase and download the music they wish to play. Following this model to enhance the Reader device, Sony has also created on web-based store for the Reader, similar to iTunes, which allows consumers to purchase and download e-books from the Sony Connect online service. By mimicking Apple's iPod marketing scheme, a system with which most consumers are already familiar, Sony has secured an even better chance to boost the market for electronic books. In “The plot thickens with a thin eBooks device,” USA Today reporter Mike Snider firmly declares that if Sony “can get this download service optimized to a point where it's on the same level as iTunes, they can recharge this market.” Snider cites several best-selling titles that have done well recently in electronic format as evidence for the preparedness of American consumers to receive books in digital form, including Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, *Angels & Demons*, and *Digital Fortress*; Michael Crichton's *State of Fear*, and George Lucas's *Revenge of the Sith*. The combination of a familiar purchasing structure for the Reader, the availability of

such popular titles in e-book form, and the convenience of the new device itself seem to indicate, as Snider and Teachout maintain, a strong potential for Sony to guarantee books a place in the digital culture.

Audio Books Evolve

Providing inspiration for Sony's Reader marketing scheme has not been the Apple iPod's only contribution to the revolution of book culture in digital America. Consumers can now use iPods or other portable digital audio players to listen to audio versions of books. To some extent, audio download services like iTunes have revitalized audio books by making them a part of the persistent consumer practice of downloading music and other audio files. As Walter S. Mossberg and Katherine Boehret point out in the *Wall Street Journal* article "A New Audio Book Option Emerges," "Audio books have been given a new life in the past few years, thanks to online services like Audible.com and iTunes." Currently, about 11,000 books are available for purchase through iTunes, even though the service primarily offers music. Audible.com, a web-based store expressly designed for audio books, has approximately 26,000 titles available, some of which are free for consumers. Audiobookcafe.com, another web service dedicated to digital audio books, offers audio recordings of original material, as well as reviews and interviews for download (Newman). The growing availability of such book-related audio content combined with the contemporary user habits of downloading audio files may be yet another way in which the digital media contributes to a revival of reading activity.

Unlike e-books, audio books have existed as a small but significant portion of the book industry over the past few decades, increasing in popularity as audio technology improves. Although only about 9% of people in America listen to live or recorded readings of novels or other books, Literature Professor John Young agrees that "audio books are now an established part of the contemporary publishing industry" (196). The relatively small number of people who listen to audio books has nevertheless been a consistent and solid segment of the reading population, a segment that could grow as a result of the increased use of digital audio players and availability of digital audio books. Up to this point, cassette tapes and compact

discs have provided the format for most audio books, which most people listen to in their cars: about 53% of all people who buy audio books claim to listen to them while driving (Newman). The more recent digital audio players, including Apple's iPod, allow for even more convenient storage and portable use of audio files, potentially increasing the use of audio books in a wider variety of contexts.

For those consumers who do not own or use a portable audio player, the recently released Playaway device mimics the portability afforded by an iPod or other digital handheld player. Introduced into the consumer market during January of this year, the Playaway has been marketed as “the digital audiobook for people who hate digital technology” (Pertone). Essentially, the Playaway is a portable and self-contained digital audio book; it does not require a user to download files from the Internet or to transfer files from one device to another. Like the Sony Reader, the Playaway reveals an attempt to re-market books in a way that corresponds to the changing consumer trends in an increasingly digitally mediated culture. Devices like the iPod have illustrated an almost palpable consumer desire for portable electronic gadgets that can act as sources of either entertainment or information. By incorporating books into the digital culture in such a way that they too can feed into that desire, the Reader and the Playaway may be capable of rejuvenating the book industry as part of, rather than in spite of, the digital revolution.

Digital Interactivity and Books

As the transformations in the television industry show, contemporary consumers have become accustomed to a sense of active engagement with media technology. Innovations that allow users to cultivate their own individual media experience, like digital video recorders, and interact with the ideas contained in mediated content, like Internet television, both reflect and promote the desire to feel connected with aspects of the new media culture. The integration of books into that culture through new electronic formats appeals to the new consumer trends in an important way, but digital technology also has the potential to encourage reading habits as well as book-related innovation. Writers and publishers have

begun to work with digital technology in ways that foster engagement with book content as well as ways that mold the book format to fit into electronic media. The key to these efforts is the creation of a digitally-based interactive environment for books that allows readers, who are also members of the new media culture, to become engaged with texts in a way that corresponds to the greater trend of active participation with both information and entertainment content.

In particular, those individuals who are responsible for the marketing and distribution of books have recently focused on the integration of the Internet into marketing schemes for new books. Authors and publishers have recognized that readers, like most contemporary media consumers, enjoy being able to develop a connection to their chosen form of entertainment through the use of digital media. Book creators and distributor are using various efforts to target different types of reading audiences, from the avid booklover to the moderate reader, all approaches which work under the assumption that an interactive synthesis with digital technology can foster book-related pursuits. In one very low-tech approach to enhance readers' sense of personal connection to books through technology involves certain authors who make themselves available for telephone conferences with books clubs throughout the country. Groups that are interested in chatting with a particular author can visit the publisher's website to arrange a conference call, which potentially happens over the Internet, as well. One publisher called this practice a "perfect way to connect with more readers," reflecting the centrality of personal connection to the perceived buying habits of contemporary American consumers (Memmott "Authors"). Phone conferences with book clubs illustrate how digital technology can be utilized to cultivate an important form of interaction by extending an author's reach beyond the typical books signing tours that can only happen in metropolitan areas. Though low-tech, such conference calls allow a wider range of readers to build a new kind of relationship with authors that contribute a new kind of enjoyment and encouragement of the reading experience.

Publishers also recognize the value of these phone conferences in their potential to retain reader participation in books clubs. Although many local book clubs are small, the groups have proven themselves to be a stable base for the marketing of new prints or for the revival of older books. Book clubs have existed in America for over a century, but, especially after the success of Oprah's televised reading club, the increased activity of these groups have made them an influential component of the contemporary reading public. *USA Today* reporter Carol Memmott attests to the importance of books clubs for contemporary writers and publishers; in the article "Authors 'phone it in' to appreciative book clubs, she points out that "Book clubs are a growing force in the publishing industry, and publishers and authors view the call-ins as a way to show their appreciation, build loyalty and market their books." In a sense, the popularity of book clubs themselves reflects the enjoyment that many readers get out of interaction based on books, and communication with authors simply adds to the interactive nature of these organizations. However, the sense of connection that phone conferences make possible is a crucial step for authors and publishers to take in order to maintain substantial fan bases in a world of ever-increasing competition for attention.

For readers who seek information and make choices about books independently of book clubs, some publishers offer another technology-based form of promotion: free book-related podcasts, which are downloadable audio files for use on an iPod or other digital audio device. As noted in the discussion of audio books, digital audio players have become quite popular among American consumers: tens of millions of people own devices capable of playing these podcasts. Some of podcasted promotional material resembles the content available on Audiobookcafe.com, like interviews with authors or authors reading excerpts from their work, and serves a function similar to that of the phone conversations with book clubs—the establishment of a new kind of personal connection with a book through digitally facilitated communication with the author. Although podcasts are a very recent digital media phenomenon, this kind of promotional campaign has already had a promising response; Holtzbrinck Publishers company, for

example, launched the site holtzbrinkpodcasts.com in February 2006, which attracted around 40,000 visitors and provided 10,000 downloads in just a few weeks (Memmott "Podcasts"). Like the book club phone conversations, podcasts put authors in dialogue with their (potential) readers and fosters interactivity, but podcasting also incorporates the use of one of the many popular handheld electronic devices that thrive in the consumer culture while phone conferences do not.

Marketing schemes that are geared toward a younger generation place a significant amount of emphasis on the new handheld technology as the means through which young readers can actively engage in reading as part of a fan base. Interaction with handheld devices, as well as promotional content delivered to them, has already proven to be a successful method of exciting young people to read. HarperCollins and Random House both participate in "cellphone marketing," which utilizes the text messaging capabilities of cell phones as a means of advertisement (Memmott "Text Messaging"). The publishing companies use text messages to promote upcoming titles as well as to encourage interactivity: many schemes include online reader polls, message boards, and the ability to register for prizes. Interested readers sign up to receive these promotional messages and other content related to the books they like to read, a reaffirmation of the fact that self-initiative is important to the current trend of individualized and interactive media experiences. Some cellphone marketing efforts have already been quite successful: approximately 8,000 fans signed up for the text messaging campaign centered on Ann Brashare's most recent novel, *Girls in Pants*, the third book in the series *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, and a similar campaign helped Meg Cabot's *The Princess Diaries* reach number one on the British best-seller charts in 2003 (Memmott "Text Messaging"). These results indicate that the combination of interactive opportunities and the delivery of personally-chosen informational text messages can enable young, technology-oriented consumers to take an active interest in books.

The appeal of the cellphone marketing campaigns relies on the existence of virtual book clubs that function similarly to traditional reading groups in that they foster interaction with books. Rather than

emphasize live, in-person conversation between readers, however, these virtual reading clubs incorporate the various forms of communication made available through digital technology, like blogs or message boards, as well as interactive and informational content. Many young but technologically-savvy readers seem to enjoy the opportunity to belong to a virtual community that allows them to digitally connect with other readers while also maintaining their sense of individuality and choice in their use of media. When readers choose to participate in cellphone marketing campaigns, they make an active declaration of their own interests and also receive access to a variety of ways to personalize their reading experience and assert their individuality. A 2000 text-messaging campaign in Japan that was targeted to teenage girls proved highly successful, especially because the book being promoted was available only to those participants. The readers received text messages that provided them with access to the website on which the book was published; the site itself received 20 million hits over the course of three years. Reflecting on the success of this campaign and others, Pamir Gelenbe, the mobile marketing services provider of Flytxt messaging, remarked, "I have no doubt that e-books are going to come to cellphones" (Memmott "Text Messaging"). If book distribution trends keep evolving and marketing schemes continue to integrate interactivity and individual choice, Gelenbe's prediction may well prove true. What is clear at the moment, however, is the fact that a combination of the Internet and handheld electronic devices can be used as successful tools to encourage the reading habits of young consumers.

Digital Interactivity and Books

The proliferation of digital entertainment devices—especially television, computer and video games, and music players—has significantly contributed to a growing concern about the way young Americans spend their time. Particularly for young generations who have never known a world without computers, digital technology has greatly influenced the development of attention spans. The growing trend of digital multitasking—constantly switching one's attention between various media—among the youth population, for example, indicates that young Americans process information in an increasingly fragmented

way. The kind of disjointed attention span multitasking fosters gives rise to the need for constant stimulation, which may be one reason why younger Americans are less likely to read books than any other segment of the population. While the plethora of information-gathering technology ensures that young people will always have access to certain forms of knowledge, some professionals worry that the decline in reading activity may lead to a decline in literacy and the ability to process information sufficiently. However, the above marketing schemes show that digital technology can be utilized in ways to encourage reading habits, and thus to prevent the potential degeneration of essential cognitive skills from occurring.

In response to declining reading levels among young Americans, educators have started to incorporate certain forms of digital reading-related technology into school curricula. *Media & Methods* magazine describes the benefits of merging technology with reading lessons, advising teachers to find uses for digital book formats in the classroom to help both regular and disadvantaged students through the creation of a more interactive atmosphere. As the success of recent text-messaging promotional campaigns show, young, technologically-oriented consumers respond well to the integration of books and media, but digital book formats can serve practical as well as entertainment purposes. Both textbooks and literature are currently available in electronic book or audio book format, each of which can benefit students, by either serving specific educational needs or enhancing the learning experience through interaction with books and with technology. For example, e-books typically contain search and bookmark features that allow students to use them during class discussions or writing exercise in a way that parallels the use of printed texts; the electronic format, however, may prove easier for some students to use or simply be more appealing to those students who feel comfortable with technology (Robinson 6). In any case, the ability to read school-related books in electronic format may encourage students to spend more time building their reading skills.

Audio books have additional advantages, particularly for students who are developing language skills. In "For the Love of Books: Expanding E-Books and Audio Books in School Libraries," educational

media specialist Linda Robinson points out that audio books can “provide reinforcement between hearing words and seeing the words in print. An audio book helps beginning readers sound out unfamiliar words. ESL [English-as-a-second-language] students can hear how words sound and the inflections in the story” (8). Materials for people who wish to learn a foreign language have long contained audio cassettes or compact discs under the assumption that the aural/visual connection is essential to comprehension of language, and the integration of audio books into linguistic education works on the same principle. Used in conjunction with print texts, audio books can augment the development of linguistic and literacy skills; they can also provide an alternative format for engaging with books or textbooks, appealing to those students who have reading difficulties like dyslexia. Whether digital book formats simply enhance interaction with books or, for some students, take the place of printed texts, they have the potential to encourage reading habits as well as the development of literacy as part of the educational process.

Regardless of how technologically advanced or electronically-based American culture becomes, fully developed literacy skills will always be essential to personal and social success. Drawing on the orality and literacy theories of media analysts Walter J. Ong and I. A. Richards in his essay “Literacy, the Basics, and All That Jazz,” Professor Thomas J. Farrell argues that reading and writing are necessary skills that foster a greater understanding of the world around us: “Reading and writing provide people, little by little, with a new way of studying what they say and what they mean and what others say and mean . . . Through reading we do build up our interior life” (452). Essentially, Farrell maintains that individuals internalize the world through inner language, and that full literacy allows for that that linguistic internalization of the world which is central to a full life experience. For some, like Farrell, the concern that new digital technology has diverted young Americans from developing good reading habits thinly veils an anxiety that literacy is in decline. To reverse the waning effect digital entertainment technology has had on reading levels among young people, these educators feel that interactive digital technology should be

incorporated into the educational process in order to encourage the kind of reading activity that contributes to more fully developed literacy skills.

The Merging of Books and Media

Although the traditional book format is becoming somewhat outdated in comparison to digital forms of entertainment, the electronic media has always had an important relationship to the content of books, which is a trend that does not seem to be in danger of disappearing. Books have often inspired cinematic adaptations, providing stories for countless films and television shows. On a commercial level, certain best-selling texts have created stirrs among mass audiences, providing consumers with a sense of connection to one another through the sharing of a cultural experience. Whenever books have been integrated into the mass media in the past, whether through reports on consumer trends or the guidance of influential figures, those media-based endorsements have encouraged even non-readers to either pick up or find out a little bit more about a book, suggesting that a book with media connections gains an edge in the consumer market. Book aligned with the mass media have regularly sold well, demonstrating the media's power to influence and promote reading activity. Such established authority corroborates the idea that further integration between books and new digital media technology has the potential to encourage and enhance reading habits for contemporary Americans.

The mass media's influence on book sales begins with the best seller list. More than just a simple report on consumer activity, the bestseller list consistently brings popular titles to the media's attention. Not only do these lists report on what readers buy, they also generate reviews and promotional materials that keep these the books in the public view. In the *USA Today* article "10 years of best sellers: How the landscape has changed," reporter Bob Minzesheimer makes the point that "despite growing competition from other parts of the entertainment industry and changes in technology, the book has survived and people continue to buy the big best sellers." Arguably, bestsellers sell precisely *because of* the

entertainment industry and technology, as various forms of mass media and entertainment programming perpetually reiterate and reinforce the book-related consumer trends. Media-based reports on what people are reading implicitly endorse these titles and often generate a kind of mass appeal among regular consumers of popular culture.

Books become part of popular culture fads in an even more conspicuous way when they are adapted into film. A narrative film based on a novel solidifies that particular book as a cultural icon, thus encouraging more and more people to read it. As Minzesheimer states, "Nothing sells books more than a movie . . . The most successful books enjoy four incarnations: hardcover, paperback, movie, and video/DVD." Because of the film industry's influential role within pop American culture, the ability movies have to invigorate the sale of books is not surprising. Reviewing the best-seller lists between 1993 and 2003, Minzesheimer notes that 19 of the bestsellers in that decade were books that had some kind of connection to film, noting a couple of ways that movies inspire book sales. For example, Laura Hillenbrand's book *Seabiscuit* sold well before being adapted to film, but not as well as it did after the film's release; according to Minzesheimer, the influence of the movie secured the novel at the number thirty-six spot on the cumulative bestsellers list for the decade. A more convoluted kind of impact occurred when the film *The Hours*, based on the book by Michael Cunningham, helped Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, to become a bestseller; Woolf's novel plays a central role in the story of *The Hours*. That the combination of filmic influence and the influence of television talk show host Oprah Winfrey successfully elevated a work of classic literature to the bestseller list in an era characterized by a decline in literary reading clearly substantiates the power of the mass media to successfully promote books.

In a society dominated by the media, consumers look to familiar sources of mediated information, like film and television, for both stimulation and guidance. Because people rely on television for a good portion of their information and entertainment, which this particular medium delivers directly into consumers' homes, many television viewers develop a sense of connection to those figures of the media

they watch on a regular basis. Even more so than with film, consumers seem to find a source of guidance in television programs and personalities, relying on the advice provided through this medium even when making decisions about what books to read. Recognizing the significance of media figures on consumer choices, the Vice President of Borders, Anne Kubek, claims that "more so than newspapers and magazines, TV and radio personalities are driving books sales" (Minzesheimer). Identification with media personalities and acceptance of their guidance is an indirect method of participation in media culture, but one that seems to correspond to the general consumer trend of connecting with their media-based entertainment.

Oprah's Book Club offers probably the best example of how reader identification with a media personality has contributed to individual consumer decisions. When talk show host Oprah Winfrey initiated a segment on her show in 1996 dedicated to the discussion of her favorite books, her viewers began purchasing those titles in record numbers, revealing their deep sense of personal connection to Winfrey. As Lisa DiCarlo points out in the article "Ye Oprah Book Club Returneth," Oprah's fans "are not sheep, but they tend to respect her opinions and believe what she says speaks directly to them." Because these viewers recognize a close relation between themselves and Winfrey, they eagerly accept her advice about books. By outlining the books that Winfrey herself likes to read, the book-related portion of the show has undeniably encouraged a number of her viewers to read as a way to further their perceived connection to her; Professor John Young declares in "Toni Morrison, Oprah Winfrey, and Postmodern Popular Audiences" that, as a daytime show targeted toward a predominantly female audience, Oprah's Book Club program "has coalesced a nation audience of women readers" (186). Reading these books gives viewers an opportunity to indirectly participate in the content of Winfrey's show, allowing them to identify even further with the host. Young claims that "The greatest desire in buying membership in 'Oprah's Books Club' is to feel a personal connection to Winfrey," a statement that highlights the consumer desire to form relationships with media figures, who thus become the source of guidance in a heavily mediated culture

(189). As Oprah's Book Club shows, this guidance given by media personalities can have a profound effect on reading activity, encouraging viewers to participate in popular culture by building personally-fulfilling connections with media figures through books.

Indeed, Oprah's Book Club immediately inspired a reading phenomenon that has been built on the sense of connection her viewers feel to her and to the show. Because of their desire to identify with her, Winfrey has been able to persuade an incredible number of her viewers to buy the books she endorses, a media-marketing phenomenon that has been dubbed "The Oprah Effect." This effect is marked by Oprah's ability as a respected media personality to drive book sales simply by her suggestion; Young's discussion of this phenomenon cites a comment from *The New York Times Book Review* that reveals the extent of Winfrey's influence on readers: "The club has also made manifest that Ms. Winfrey is the most powerful book marketer in the United States. On a really good day, she sends more people to bookstores than the morning news programs, the other daytime shows, the evening magazines, radio shows, print reviews and feature articles all rolled into one" (188). Correspondingly, DiCarlo points out in "Ye Oprah Book Club Returneth" that 46 of the titles Winfrey chose for her show between 1996 and 2002 became bestsellers, and, in "10 years of best sellers: How the landscape has changed," Bob Minzesheimer adds that four of her selections remained in the top 100 bestsellers of the decade, even though the original Book Club aired for only 8 of the 10 years he looks at. Winfrey revived the book club in 2003, deciding the second time around to highlight examples of classic literary novels like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which neared the top ten on the *New York Times* bestseller list in 2003 as a result of Oprah's endorsement and the film based on Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* (DiCarlo). The Oprah Effect has been one of the most vividly successful examples of media-related encouragement for consumers to start and keep reading books.

Interestingly, the phenomenon of the Oprah Effect has expanded beyond Winfrey's show, illustrating that other media outlets have recognized their own potential to promote reading habits in the

same way as Oprah's Book Club. On a general level, EPM Communications' *Research Alert Yearbook* reported that revenue from all book clubs went up by 1.8% even in 2004, several years after Winfrey's book discussions began, and only one year after she reinstated the new version of the program (251).

Presumably, the success of Oprah's Book Club has invigorated consumer interest in other book clubs as well, including those started by various other media groups, like the *USA Today's* "Today's Books" and ABC Good Morning America's "Read This!." Book clubs themselves, like individual media personalities, act as a source of guidance for readers within the culture of an almost overwhelming number of choices; those book clubs that are backed by familiar and trusted sources of media, like Oprah's Book Club, seem to have an even greater impact on the direction of consumer choice.

Even without the creation of a book club, sometime the exposure a book gets from television is enough to inspire sales. Edward Wyatt's New York Times article "Selling Books on TV Without Oprah" discusses how author and saleswoman Jeanne Bice sold 15,000 copies of her memoir *Pull Yourself Up by Your Bra Straps* during one short segment on the shopping channel QVC. Wyatt points out Bice also sold approximately 19,000 books over two later television segments, reaching a total of 34,534 sold copies in the equivalent of less than half an hour of airtime (E1). Bice's success illustrates how media exposure itself can influence consumer choice, but Wyatt and QVC producers also attribute much of the book's success to the show's communication of the author's personality. One producer reportedly commented that "Ms. Bice's appeal is obvious after just a few minutes of viewing one her [sales] segments on QVC. She has a kind of Everywoman personality, as well as an ability to tell stories that keeps viewers entertained and longing to hear more" (Wyatt E7). This statement confirms the notion that viewers/readers tend to relate to those personalities in the media, often basing their consumer choices on a sense of connection with a familiar and trusted media individual.

Recognition of the fact that popular media figures can inspire people to read books has also led to the purposeful integration of media elements into the content of books. More and more books are based

on elements of popular media culture, in a kind of reversal of the initial trend of converting books into media formats. The contemporary publishing company Simon Spotlight Entertainment, for example, targets readers between the ages of 18 and 35—prime consumers of mass media—and has committed itself to turning aspects of popular culture into published texts. This company was responsible for the writing and the publication of *He's Just Not That Into You*, a novel based on an episode of the popular HBO show *Sex and the City*. The success of the book was largely the result of the story's foundation in the media as well as promotion of the novel by the media—Oprah Winfrey featured the authors of this novel on her show during a segment of Oprah's Book Club. Furthermore, the combination of media that characterizes this example—a story grounded in popular media culture, the endorsement of a respected media personality, and the opportunity for viewers to "meet" the authors through a pervasive medium—demonstrate a shift in the creation and selling of books that corresponds with the changing habits of media consumers.

The trend of authors entering the mass media, like the writers of *He's Just Not That Into You* or QVC's Jeanne Bice, has increased over the past few years, probably inspired by Oprah's Book Club as much as the growth of the mass media. In any case, as the growing trend of phone conferences between authors and book clubs illustrates, readers derive a sense of personal connection to a text through communication with the author that enhances their reading experience; these connections often drive choice or motivate readers to continue reading certain texts. As one publisher is quoted as saying in Carol Memmott's article "Authors 'phone it in' to appreciative book clubs, "Gone are the days when a publisher could take out an ad, count on a few reviews and have an author do a couple of signings. Nowadays, readers want to feel a connection with an author." Publishing companies like Simon Spotlight Entertainment recognize the significance of the media in fostering these desired connections, selecting writers to publish largely based on their potential to succeed as media personalities. Executive Jennifer Bergstrom explains that "Ninety percent of our authors are first-time authors, and most of them have platforms in other media. And what we decide to publish is greatly affected by our publicity department—

who we can get on 'The Daily Show' or who might be great on a radio tour" (Wyatt "Pop Culture"). Clearly, many publishers feel that the integration of authors as well as books into the context of contemporary popular culture through mass media outlets can directly enhance their success.

The interplay between books and media has increased dramatically in recent years, as more media producers recognize that the combination of books and media content can be beneficial for both industries, as well as to the reading habits of Americans. Film adaptations of novels, televised book shows, and author appearances in the media have all contributed to the growing trend of "as-read-in-books" entertainment content. The *Research Alert Yearbook* points out, for example, that "more and more popular movies tend to be sequels or based on well-known stories or characters from other media." Indeed, some of the most successful movies of late have been based on popular book collections, like the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy or the *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series. Moreover, novels and short stories—the most commonly read of all printed texts in America—provided the basis for quite a few of the films nominated for the 2006 Academy Awards, including *Brokeback Mountain*, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Pride & Prejudice*, *North Country*, and *Capote*. The popular and critical success with which these films met indicate a growing appreciation for the adaptation of printed texts into visual media formats, as well as the potential for the mass media to encourage Americans to read the book versions of these narratives. Discerning a promising situation, Random House publishing company recently initiated a movie division through a partnership with Focus Features intentionally designed "to parlay its books into films" (Lowry). This kind of synthesis serves as evidence of the reciprocal influence that is continually occurring between both forms of narrative entertainment.

While films are increasingly inspired by novels and stories, the structure of novels and stories has progressively conformed to media influence. Contemporary narrative structure continues to adapt to new patterns set by the media and to cater to the new kind of consumer attention span shaped by the media. Carol Fitzgerald, president of BookReporter.com, uses the complex structure of the *Harry Potter* books as

an example of how writing and narrative style in printed materials conforms to new standards established by the media: according to Fitzgerald, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* book series "showed us that children appreciated complicated story lines. They live in a world of 15-minute television programming where a story unfolds and warps, often with complex detail. It's changed how they want to read from the moment they get started" (Minzesheimer). Young readers, like their older counterparts, are developing new expectations for books based on their experience with media. The complexity of the *Harry Potter* stories caters to the need for constant stimulation that young Americans possess, just as the format of electronic books and hypertext fiction by writers like Cory Doctorow indulge consumers infatuation with electronic technology. Books have long contributed to the content of the media, but the media now plays a growing role in the writing of books, a synthesis that has and will continue to foster reading habits among media consumers for as long as books continue to exist.

Potential of a Combined Platform

Based on the demonstrated ability of the mass media and digital media technology to encourage reading activity, the further synthesis of books and media seems integral to the perpetuation of books in American culture. An interactive television format would not only conform to the transformations already occurring in regard to the medium but also appeal to the contemporary consumer desire to become actively engaged with media. Moreover, a television channel based on books would provide a forum for the promotion of reading activity, an attractive result for publishers. The following analysis will examine the potential success of such a channel as a source of entertainment, consumer guidance, and revenue.

Over recent years, the convergence of media corporations has created a corporate media structure made up of a few major conglomerates that control essentially all sources of media entertainment and information, including publishing companies. The five biggest publishers—Random House, Penguin, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins, and Time Warner—are now all part of media entertainment

conglomerates (Minzesheimer). These five companies accounted for approximately 67% of all books sales in the year 2004, a profit that ultimately reached the same corporations that make money from television shows, newspapers, and films (RAB "Book Stores"). Thus, the mass media has an incentive to spur more profitable book sales, when these sales generate revenue that potentially makes possible the creation of more mass media content. Theoretically, any television program that encourages consumers to read books also furthers the sale of books, making such a platform desirable to the owners of the media conglomerates as well as publishers.

Any program that is aired through a cable channel prospectively reaches a significant majority of American consumers: a 2000 survey states that cable reaches 67% of all U.S. homes and 80% of household with annual income over \$50,000, the latter of which corresponds to the segment of the United States population that demonstrates the most reading activity (RAB "Satellite"). The number of Americans purchasing cable access has leveled out in the past few years, but, as previously stated, the number of subscribers to digital broadcast satellite service has increased rapidly in the same time frame. Together, these services give the majority of consumers the opportunity to watch a wide variety of specialized programming, content which viewing trends indicate is increasingly popular: network viewing declined by over 50% in the final two decades of the 20th century (RAB "Satellite"). More people have access to and choose to watch specialized programming now than ever before. Therefore, a new kind of program that appeals to reading consumers, most of whom probably subscribe to at least one kind of television service, has the ability to promote books directly to those individuals who wish to learn more about them, simultaneously satisfying consumer desires for more content choice.

While consumers desire choice, they also seem to appreciate some source of guidance through the "media clutter" that characterizes American society, often relying on identification with the mass media or a media personality to shape their decisions. As the phenomenal the general trend of integrating books into media content illustrates, readers—and other consumers—often become interested in certain books

because the media implicitly endorses them and/or allows readers to interact and connect with books in different ways. Reiterating her point about the influence of media personalities on book sales, Anne Kubek from Borders also state that "readers are increasingly taking their clues (on what to buy) from the people they watch and listen to" (Minzesheimer). As discussed, Oprah's Book Club inspired millions of sales for the titles featured on the show due to Winfrey's personal influence on her viewers. Similarly, other media sponsored book clubs have led to tens of thousands of sales for the books they endorse. Referring to the impact of Oprah's Book Club, as well as those reading groups initiated by USA Today, Time, and ABC, Random House executive Stuart Applebaum points out, "You have four national media brands telling their audiences that this is worth their time. You can't put a price tag on that" (DiCarlo). The successful influence that these media-based programs have had in guiding consumer reading habits indicates that other similar programs will also result in the direction of reader choice within the world of innumerable options, ensuring sales for books but also providing guidance for viewers.

As a program choice, a combined television/Internet platform that centers on books would correspond to the kind of television programming for which consumers have expressed desire. Perhaps surprisingly, a large majority of cable and DBS subscribers say they enjoy and would like more educational and documentary-type programming on television. According to a 2003 study by the Satellite Broadcasting and Communications Association, for example, 81% of viewers who subscribed to DBS claimed that educational programming was one of their favorite genres and 49% wanted to see more of this genre added to their subscription packages. Similarly, 84% claimed that the documentary genre was another favorite, and 41% expressed a desire for more programming of this kind (RAB "Satellite"). In the context of the cultural "media clutter," content that is tailored to expressed user interests would undoubtedly have a competitive edge in the perpetual battle for consumer attention, meeting consumer requirements as well as the need for profit.

The potential profitability of a program centered on books would be enhanced by the relatively low cost of production. I envision the channel to act as a "hub" that provides access to a variety of book-related content and information already in existence: Aside from a few relatively inexpensive original elements, such as a recorded "talk show" or video interviews, the program would consist mainly of resources collected from outside sources, including the Internet, other television programs, and film. The financial situation of such a program is enhanced by its foundation in interactive digital technology: a television program in which Internet functions are embedded would necessarily be a part of digital service, in which video on demand has become an integral part. Such a platform may also be offered through video on demand service as a way to generate revenue, especially if cable and satellite service become offered on an a la carte basis, as recent debates have suggested might happen.

If video on demand/pay-per-channel service does indeed provide the structure for future television programming, a program designed expressly to fit into that mold would likely attract a significant number of viewers. Reporting on the debate over a la carte service and the recent growth of available VOD content, USA Today's Dave Liberman quotes Josh Sapan, the CEO of Rainbow Media, as saying that "The VOD platform has a crying need for material and brands built just for it." Video on demand itself corresponds to the trend of active participation in and cultivation of individual media experience, a consumer desire that the proposed book program would also satisfy. Interactivity with the television medium has already been integrated in certain VOD programming, like the *Dating on Demand* show developed by Comcast, indicating that viewers are prepared for such a transformation of content, regardless of the medium's current status. Overall, a program that combines interactive elements with content in which viewers are interested and a service platform they desire, the potential for its success, as a source of entertainment, consumer guidance and corporate revenue, seems to be very great indeed.

In her 2003 article "Ye Oprah Book Club Returneth," Lisa DiCarlo makes the point that "Readers are still reading, and nonreaders are still watching TV, perhaps watching people talk about books." Three years later, this statement may still be true, developments in digital media technology have integrated books even further into the media landscape than Oprah Winfrey did by initiating her televised book club. While the influential Oprah Effect probably still outshines the effects of digital book promotions or book-related technologies on reading habits, there remains a valid potential for digital media technology to reinvigorate consumer interest in books. And even if such technology, like the proposed interactive television channel, does not succeed in converting nonreaders into readers, such technology will surely continue to enhance the reading experience for those media consumers who do read books.

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